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SATURDAY REVIEW
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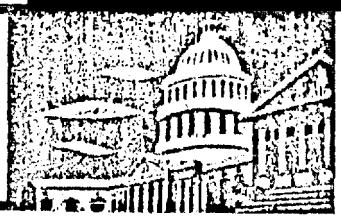
State of Affairs



New Tools for the CIA

THE Central Intelligence Agency, that problem child of the American government, got another governess the other day when John McCone stepped aside for his successor, Admiral Raborn. The change was not in any way a disciplinary move. On the contrary, both the agency and its supervision have been getting increasingly better marks among insiders.

It was with John McCone that the romantic age of the Dulles era ended and something of a managerial revolution began. Allen Dulles, who used to be referred to as the "master spy," learned his craft in Switzerland during World War II when, understandably, it was almost all cloak-and-dagger work. The fascination of spycraft continued to keep a hold over him. Very often he talked to some of the secret agents himself, and very often he tried to second-guess them.

He was not unaware, of course, of the great opportunities new scientific inventions offered, and it was under him that the technological era of spying made great strides. The notorious U-2, the most effective spy ever invented, was developed, and a start was made, with the spy-in-the-sky satellites—though their value may have been exaggerated. Automation thus took its toll even among the Mata Haris, for the number of enemy missile emplacements and nuclear production lines came to matter much more than the number of enemy divisions or what General X had to say.

And yet it was the excess of romanticism in the CIA that became its undoing and led to the Bay of Pigs disaster. The outcry then for something close to disciplinary action became deafening and John McCone became the disciplinarian. The light reins Allen Dulles had kept were tightened, most of the central authority that had been delegated a little too freely was reasserted, and a somewhat autocratic regime was introduced. Great pains apparently were taken to prevent accusations that the CIA was running its own air forces, or installing governments it preferred, and emphasis was shifted to the less dangerous but ultimately more important analytical work. The so-called national estimates here became something of a Bible inside the government and are now accepted by men like Rusk and McNamara as their guidelines. (President Kennedy, when he appointed John McCone, told him that what haunted him most were the true objectives of Soviet, Chinese, and international Communism, and he wanted these carefully analyzed.)

The Director of Central Intelligence has always suffered from a certain schizophrenia. There is the question of his main customer and favorite reader: is it the President or the government in general? There is the dilemma of whether his main function is to preside over the entire intelligence community—military and civilian—or solely to run the CIA.

President Kennedy was immensely interested in the craft of intelligence and he himself often asked for various refinements of an analysis. President Johnson is not particularly interested in the operation of intelligence agencies; he is chiefly a user. He judges everything by the end product. And so the emphasis now is on improving the end result. He soon gave up the personal intelligence briefings by McCone himself, preferring instead to read the reports (although since the recent installation of press tickers in his own office Mr. Johnson often telephones the CIA director for the inside story of what he reads on the tape). This has restored some of the personal attention of the Kennedy days, which evidently made people feel that they did not work in oblivion.

To improve the end product is, of course, easier said than done. The assessment of enemy intentions is always a chancey business. During the Diem days in Vietnam, for instance, the CIA was not only well abreast of events, but was indeed said to be able to influence them. After the fall of Diem, as one official puts it, "the CIA had the props knocked from under its feet," and ever since has had trouble keeping up with events. Clearly, men who are planning coups that displease the United States are going to keep their intentions closely guarded from Americans who would want to take countermeasures. As to the larger picture in Vietnam, the key question, of course, is whether the Chinese will intervene and under what circumstances. The prevailing view of the analysts is that they will not intervene with troops, and (though there are dissenters to this opinion), the Johnson Administration is proceeding on the basis of it.

Another hard test for the intelligence analysts came with the rebellion in the Dominican Republic. The massive American intervention in that area and President Johnson's warning that "there are signs that people outside the Dominican Republic are seeking to gain control over the rebel movement" were very likely based, at least partly, on CIA intelligence estimates. All this goes to show how important indeed is the CIA's "end product," for on the basis of it the President may decide how to meet an emergency.

THERE was considerable opposition to John McCone when President Kennedy appointed him. Fourteen Senators voted against the appointment and there was much criticism in the press. One liberal columnist devoted seven columns and two broadcasts to attacking him, but recently he confessed that he now feels he erred.

McCone, who looks more like a man of the cloth than of the cloak, does not make friends easily. He is withdrawn and austere and has the autocratic way of corporation presidents. One member of the Atomic Energy Commission once said that McCone, during his tenure as the commission's chairman, often went to meetings with his mind already made up, and was concerned only to convince others of the rightness of his own view. But those who were bothered by his rigidity of mind on some matters now admit surprise that he showed much subtlety in distinguishing between the détente with the Soviet Union and Chinese implacability.

Summing up his experience now, McCone says that the most dangerous trap in intelligence work is to rely on one's own hunches. The essence in this game, he feels, is to sort out the wheat from the chaff of mass data, refine it, reflect on the result, and then reach a judgment.

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